

How to get over a METRIC HANG-UP

My height is	_____ cm
My waist measurement is	_____ cm
The length of my foot is	_____ cm
The widest part of my little fingernail is about	_____ 1 cm
The heights of other _____	_____ cm
members of my _____	_____ cm
family are _____	_____ cm
The distance between my home and my doctor's office is	_____ km
If I want to stay healthy I will observe the speed limit... on major highways it will be	_____ 100 km/h
My mass is	_____ kg
I should lose about	_____ kg
I would like my mass to be	_____ kg
My normal body temperature is	_____ 37°C
I should go to bed when my temperature is	_____ 38°C
I should call the doctor when my temperature is	_____ 39°C
My baby's temperature taken rectally should be	_____ 37.5°C
For healthy surroundings I will set my thermostat at	_____ 20°C
I will dress warmly at freezing temperatures or below	_____ 0°C
I will beware of frostbite when the wind chill factor is below	_____ -10°C
I will take things easy when there's a heat wave about	_____ 35°C
I will bring water to a boil at	_____ 100°C
Instead of a teaspoon of medicine I will take	_____ 5 mL
Instead of a quart of milk, I will drink	_____ 1 L



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Ministry of
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Better health
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Dennis R. Timbrell,
Minister

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Metric medicine is easy



So you don't want to go metric!

"Nobody's going to make me go metric." "I'm too old to learn." "It's too confusing."

It's hard to break the thinking habits of a lifetime. Why should we, anyway? We still have our old scales to weigh ourselves, our old thermometers to take our temperature, and our old tape measures to size ourselves up.

But it's a metric world we live in. Ninety-eight per cent of the world is now on the metric system or moving into the metric system, and Canada is one of the last countries to convert. Canadian manufactured goods can't compete in a world that wants metric. To say "go metric or go broke" is putting it very strongly, but it may not be far from the truth.

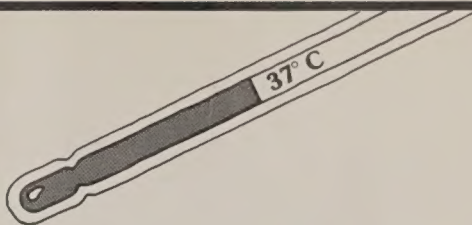
So, like it or not, it's happening. Labs and hospitals have already converted; eventually, doctors will too. And sooner or later, the old thermometers will crack, the old scales will break, and the old tape measures will wear out.

What's wrong with the old system?

The system of measuring in feet and inches, pounds and ounces, cups and quarts, and degrees Fahrenheit, may seem easy to those of us who grew up with it. Actually, it isn't. None of the measurements divide into each other with any kind of ease. The relationships between mass,* length and liquid measurements are muddled by the difficulty of strange multiples (like 12, or 16 or, heaven forbid, 5,280). It's a system that just grew, like Topsy, with little rhyme or reason. It's irrational.

The metric system is a rational system. Practically everything's nicely related to practically everything else — mass to length, length to liquid measure. Everything is measured in multiples of ten and it's an easy system to use once you learn it. But you'll just have to take our word for it, because we won't make the mistake of trying to teach it to you right now! By all means get a conversion table, but our purpose is more straightforward than that. We want to start you thinking metric about three or four things related to your health.

*Mass is the correct metric term for weight.



Your temperature in Celsius

Learning to read a Celsius thermometer correctly is an essential.

Normal body temperature in Celsius is 37 degrees (37°C). * So far, no problem.

The danger here is when your temperature is *not* normal. One degree Celsius is equal to nearly two degrees Fahrenheit. *So on a Celsius thermometer, two degrees above normal is a very high temperature.* A baby's temperature, taken rectally, should be 37.5°C. (For those who've been wondering: the term "centigrade," once used to denote the temperature measuring system invented by Anders Celsius, has been discontinued, because it's a term also used in geometry.)

Your height in centimetres

Learning to think of height in centimetres is less essential, but very useful, especially for parents of growing children.

An average man stands about 180 cm tall; an average woman, 162 cm. One metre (100 cm) is about the height of a 3.5-year-old child. A newborn baby will average about 50 cm in length.

Your mass in kilograms

Considering the extent of the mass problem in Canada (more than half of all Canadians weigh too much) it's important to learn something about your mass in kilograms.

If you put on 2 kg of body mass, you've just gained more than you probably think.

The average woman (162 cm tall) will have a mass of 55 to 67 kg. The average man (180 cm tall) will have a mass of 72 to 80 kg.

*Notice we used the symbol notation for degrees Celsius. We will continue to do so throughout this pamphlet. For a glossary of terms refer to the last page.

Taking your metric medicine

Prescriptions or patent medicines which now call for a teaspoon measurement may, instead, call for 5 mL. The two measurements are roughly equivalent.

And more to come

Don't be alarmed when you start hearing other metric measurements applied to the health system! Eventually, your visual acuity will be measured that way (6/6 instead of 20/20). Your doctor may read your blood pressure in kilopascals. Diet charts will talk about kilojoules instead of calories.

But that's all in the future and in most cases, you won't have to learn what the measurements mean. Trust your doctor to tell you whether your eyesight and your blood pressure are good or bad. And a cream puff is a cream puff, whether you measure it in calories or kilojoules.

A word to the unconverted

Of course you can't carry conversion tables in your head. Don't even try! Instead, learn the metric measurements of a few everyday things you can use as points of reference, like your mass, your height, your normal body temperature. Keep it simple and in no time at all you'll find yourself thinking metric.

Have a look at our Metric Hang-Up on the back of this pamphlet. It's one way to get rid of your own!

Glossary

°C	= degrees Celsius
cm	= centimetre(s)
kg	= kilogram(s)
mL	= millilitre(s)
km	= kilometre(s)
km/h	= kilometres per hour